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ABSTRACT

A total of 360 child care workers from licensed facilities were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the occupational worth of various child care jobs. Respondents were family and group day care providers, and day care center, Head Start, and nursery school teachers. Overall, these child care workers differed in the ways they perceived what various members of their occupation deserve in relation to job pay and status. These perceptions were not biased in favor of their own jobs. Respondents agreed that society affords nursery school teachers the highest pay and job status. They did not agree that nursery school teachers' actual contributions to society were greater than those of other child care workers. Child care workers reported being professionals when they were asked directly, yet they reported a no-job status on career profile patterns. Implications for career development and training of child care workers are discussed. Approximately 40 references are cited. (Author/RH)

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Child Care Workers' Perceptions of Their Occupational Worth

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Running Head: CHILD CARE WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Three-hundred-sixty child care workers from licensed facilities were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the occupational worth of various child care jobs. Respondents were family and group day care providers, and day care center, Head Start, and nursery school teachers. Overall these child care workers differ in the ways they perceive what various members of their occupation deserve in relation to job pay and status. These perceptions were not biased in favor of their own jobs. Respondents agreed that society affords nursery school teachers the highest pay and job status. They did not concur that nursery school teachers' actual contributions to society were greater than other child care occupations. Child care workers reported being professionals when directly asked, yet they reported a no-job status on career profile patterns. Implications for career development and training of child care workers were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research examining the quality of child care programs has revealed that the most important determinant of quality is the adult with whom the child interacts on a regular basis (Coelen, Glanz, & Calore, 1978; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips, Grajick, & Schwarz, 1982; McCartney, 1984). Yet, child care providers represent one of the most poorly understood and least rewarded of all professional groups (Whitebook, 1984; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1984a, 1984b). While some attention has been paid to describing child care providers by examining the variety of work roles they assume and the personal and professional histories brought to these roles (e.g., Katz, 1984a, 1984b; Pettygrove & Greenman, 1984), little attention has been paid to how perceived status and financial worth of providing child care relate to providers' sense of occupational worth or professional identity.

According to Bernard (1981), the job a person does is closely associated with feelings of identity, worth, and self-esteem. Research has shown that workers who exhibit a lower sense of occupational worth evaluate themselves negatively (Fuqua & Couture, 1986; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). These workers are more likely to suffer occupational burn out. Burn out is related to absenteeism, turnover, and poor job performance. Within the child care field this is a serious problem when one realizes that turnover rates in child care centers range from 15 to 30% a year, exceeding the national average of 10% for most human service jobs

(Seiderman, 1978). In addition, absenteeism and turnover relate to the consistency and continuity of care that is so critical for the development of healthy children (Kontos & Wells, 1986; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1984a, 1984b).

Child care workers comprise a widely diversified group of professionals, including family day care providers, center day care staff, and nursery school and Head Start teachers. While all of these workers provide some kind of child care, they do so in a variety of settings, some of which are more visible or prestigious than others. This visibility may impact on status held within the child care profession and society. It may also impact on workers' view of themselves as professionals (Apple, 1983, 1985; Silin, 1985; Spodek, Saracho, & Peters, 1988; Finkelstein, 1985a, 1985b; Grothberg, 1977; Hawes & Hiner, 1985).

The purpose of this study was to investigate child care workers' perceptions of their own and their peers occupational worth and to examine indices of their professionalism. Emphasis was placed on child care workers' perceptions of occupational worth since, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) states "the aspects of the environment that are most powerful in shaping the course of psychological growth are overwhelmingly those that have meaning to the person in a given situation." (p. 22).

METHOD

Subjects

Data were collected from 360 child care workers who worked in licensed facilities in a midwestern state. In this study the following terms were operationally defined using descriptions from current state licensing regulations. Family day care provider referred to the adult who cared for seven or fewer children (including her own under six years of age) in her own home for pay. Group day care provider referred to the adult who with an adult assistant cared for eight to 11 children in a home-like setting for pay. Day care center teacher referred to the adult who cared for children on a regular basis in a center-based setting for pay. Nursery school teacher referred to the adult who cared for children for half-days or less in a center-based setting for pay. Head Start teacher referred to the adult who cared for children within a structured setting as dictated by Head Start Program Guidelines for pay.

Included in this sample were 104 family day care home providers, 26 group day care home providers, 101 day care center providers, 26 Head Start teachers, and 95 nursery school teachers. Responses from eight males who answered the survey were not included in the data analyses since their numbers were so small. Responses from a total of 352 female child care workers were analyzed this study.

The respondents came from rural (40.6%) and urban (59.4%) locations. Of the 352 child care workers studied, 224 (63.6%) had children (M=2.74) and 128 (36.4%) were childfree; 221 (62.5%)

were married and 131 (37.5%) were unmarried (single, divorced, widowed). Respondents' mean age was 30.61 years (SD=7.27) and their mean years of education was 13.63 (SD=3.47).

Instruments

Occupational worth and indices of professionalism were measured using the Occupational Worth Inventory (OWI). An initial draft of the OWI was constructed based on a review of the literature (e.g., Almy, 1975; Apple, 1983, 1985; Bledstein, 1976; Bloxall & Reagan, 1978; Caldwell, 1984; Combs, 1982; Cravens, 1985; Eiskovitz & Becker, 1983; Hostetler & Klugman, 1982; Katz, 1984a, 1984b; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1984a, 1984b; Pleck, 1985; Schreiber, 1979; Spencer, 1986) and the researcher's experience as a child care worker and an instructor of early childhood education. The initial draft was piloted with 23 senior early childhood education students and five child development faculty members to improve item clarity and questionnaire format.

After the pilot study, the OWI was revised and administered to 377 child care workers who voluntarily attended a behavior management workshop provided by the University of Nebraska under a contract with the Nebraska Department of Social Services. Of the 377 participants, 360 (95%) completed and returned the OWI. The 52 item inventory was divided into four sections: (1) demographic characteristics [workshop demographics, age, sex, marital status, educational level, occupational demographics, family demographics]; (2) job characteristics [current job, job longevity data, role descriptors, job conditions, benefits];

(3) job values [rankings of perceived job value-"Rank how you view the social value of each of the following jobs", deserved pay-"Which of the following early childhood professionals should be paid the most?", deserved status- "Rank how you view the social status (amount of prestige) for each of the following jobs", career profile pattern, occupational ratings]; (4) family descriptors [family strengths items, perceived family support items]. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients were computed for the family support and family strength items. The reliability estimates were .87 for the family support items and .79 for the family strength items.

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The results were divided into two sets for data analyses: occupational worth and indices of professionalism. Occupational worth was chiefly concerned with workers' perceptions of occupational worth of child care workers as measured by rankings of deserved job pay, job status, and perceived job societal value. Indices of professionalism were items concerned with workers' report of career profile patterns, professional organizational affiliations, job longevity projections, and identification of themselves as business people and professionals.

Occupational Worth

To determine overall whether rank ordering on deserved job pay, job status, and job value was significantly related to a specific job performed within child care occupations, Friedman's rank order analyses of variance (Kirk, 1982) using a randomized

block design with repeated measures on dependent variables job pay, job status, and job value with the independent variable of child care group (day care home provider vs. group day care home provider vs. day care center teacher vs. nursery school teacher vs. Head Start teacher) were performed. To determine what were the differences in rankings among the child care jobs, Duncan Multiple Range Comparison post-hoc tests (Strahan, 1986) were computed.

Deserved Job Pay

Ranking of job pay by child care group was analyzed using an analyses of variance using Friedman's technique which revealed a significant effect for child care group, $F(4,335) = 2.41$, $p. < .05$ and subject, $F(4,335) = 12.78$, $p. < .001$. This indicated a high degree of variability between respondents and within the five child care occupational groups on the rankings of deserved pay. Overall, the analysis indicated that child care workers did not equally rank the different child care jobs on deserved job pay.

To determine what were the differences in rankings among the child care jobs, a Duncan Multiple Range Comparison post-hoc test was computed. Results indicated that respondents rank ordered nursery school teachers ($M = 3.22$) and group day care home providers ($M = 3.17$) significantly higher than day care home providers ($M = 2.99$), Head Start teachers ($M = 2.86$), and day care center teachers ($M = 2.84$) on deserved job pay. Differences in rankings of nursery school teachers and group day care home providers were not significantly different. Similarly,

differences in rankings among the other three child care groups were not significantly different.

To determine if rank order of deserved job pay was related to the raters' child care occupational group, Friedman's rank order analyses of variance using a randomized block design with repeated measures on dependent variable deserved job pay and independent variables family day care provider, group day care home provider, day care center teacher, Head Start teacher, and nursery school teacher were performed. The results of the analyses of variance for deserved pay by each child care occupational group are summarized in Table 1.

Results of the post hoc comparison tests indicated that deserved job pay rank orderings by respondents within each child care occupational group reflected a preference for respondents' own occupational group only for nursery school teachers. Day care home providers ranked Head Start teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.28), nursery school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.29), themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 3.16) and day care center teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.90) significantly higher than group day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.72) on deserved job pay.

Insert Table 1 about here

Group day care home providers ranked nursery school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.69) significantly higher than day care center teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.15), themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 3.04), Head Start teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.81) and day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.35) on deserved job pay.

Day care center teachers ranked nursery school teachers (M = 3.64) significantly higher than group day care home providers (M = 3.28), day care home providers (M = 2.89) themselves (M = 2.75), and Head Start teachers (M = 2.46) on deserved job pay.

Head Start teachers ranked group day care providers (M = 4.08) significantly higher than day care home providers (M = 3.27), day care center teachers (M = 2.81) nursery school teachers (M = 2.62) and themselves (M = 2.27)on deserved job pay.

Although nursery school teachers ranked themselves highest on deserved job pay, their rankings did not differ significantly for the child care occupational groups studied.

Deserved Job Status

Rankings of job status by group was analyzed using an analyses of variance with Friedman's technique which revealed a significant effect for child care group, $F(4,339) = 6.75$, $p. < .0001$. This indicated a high degree of variability within child care occupational groups concerning perceptions of which child care occupation commanded the most job status.

The results of the Duncan Multiple Range Comparison post-hoc tests indicated that overall respondents rank-ordered nursery school teachers (M = 3.43) significantly higher than day care center teachers (M = 3.24), Head Start teachers (M = 3.23), group day care home providers (M = 3.07)and day care home providers (M = 3.04).

To determine if rankings were dependent on respondents' own occupational group, Friedman's rank order analyses of variance

using a randomized block design with repeated measures on perceived job status and independent variables family day care provider, group day care provider, day care center teacher, Head Start teacher, and nursery school teacher were performed. The results of the analyses of variance for deserved job status by each child care occupational group are summarized in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Results of the post-hoc comparison tests indicated that deserved job status rank orderings by respondents within each child care occupational group reflected a preference for respondents' own occupational group for nursery school and Head Start teachers. Day care home providers ranked nursery school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.30), Head Start teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.17) and day care center teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.03) significantly higher than themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 2.76) and group day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.74) on deserved job status.

Group day care home providers ranked nursery school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 4.04) significantly higher than Head Start teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.69) day care center teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.12), themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 2.54) and day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 1.62) on deserved job status.

Day care center teachers ranked nursery school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.42) and group day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.30) significantly higher than themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 3.00), day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.94) and Head Start teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.91) on deserved job status.

Head Start teachers ranked themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 3.50) and group day care providers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.50) identically and significantly higher than day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.81), day care center teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.38) and nursery school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.26) on deserved job status.

Nursery school teachers ranked themselves ($\underline{M}$ = 3.43) significantly higher than all other groups on deserved job status. Their rankings for day care center teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.21), group day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.09), day care home providers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.71) and Head Start teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.67) were all statistically lower.

Perceived Job Societal Value

Analyses of variance for perceived job societal value did not yield a significant effect for child care group or subject.

Indices of Professionalism

Within the OWI, respondents were asked to identify career profile patterns which best described their past work history. Slightly less than one-half of the survey respondents (46.8%) reported career profiles in which current job was considered actual employment. Their responses included answers such as: not working outside the home (4.4%), marriage (14.0%), or homemaking career (27.5%). This suggested that for some respondents, their present child care occupation was not perceived as real jobs or a career placement.

Respondents in this study were asked if they considered themselves to be professionals. Nearly three-fourths (74.9%) of the 351 who responded to this question identified themselves as

a professional. Less than one-half (41%) reported being a business person. Just under one-half of the respondents (48.8%) reported belonging to a professional organization. Twenty-seven percent belonged to one, 17.5% belonged to two, and 4.3% belonged to three or more professional organizations. One-third of the respondents reported they were unlikely to pursue a child care occupation again; two thirds suggested they were somewhat or very likely to train for or choose their present jobs if given an opportunity to do so.

When asked about the time spent in their child care occupation, 48.0% of the child care workers reported working in a child care job for two years or less; 65.9% had worked four years or less; and 84.3% of the workshop attendants had worked six years or less. Over half the respondents surveyed (53.8%) reported not knowing how long they would remain in the child care field. Nearly one-fourth (24.6%) calculated they would remain one to five years. The remaining 21.6% reported their estimated professional longevity to be between six and 40 years.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The pattern of findings yields an interesting picture of child care professionals' perceptions of themselves and their peers. The results of the data analyses are supportive of three major conclusions. First, child care workers differ overall in the ways they perceive what other members of their occupation deserve in relation to job pay and status. Furthermore, these perceptions are not biased in favor of their own job. Second, while respondents agree that society affords nursery school

teachers the highest pay and job status, they do not concur that nursery school teachers' actual contributions to society are greater than that of any other child care occupation studied. Third, child care workers identify themselves as professionals when directly asked, yet they report a no-job status on career profile patterns, few professional affiliations, and unclear direction about projected job longevity in the child care field.

Occupational Worth

The results of this study reveal discrepancies or contradictions in the way child care workers view their job worth and professional identity. Two of these discrepancies deal with perceptions of occupational worth and the third is more directly related to indices of professionalism. First, while respondents clearly agree that nursery school teachers command the most status and salary, they do not concur that nursery school teachers' actual contribution to society is greater than that of other child care jobs. Second, while workers could assign high status and pay to nursery school teachers, they do not make clear distinctions between the four remaining groups. Finally, while the child care workers studied perceive themselves as professionals, other indices of professionalism indicated differently. In some ways, these results concerning professionalism parallel attitudes found in society at large (Zigler & Gordon, 1982; Zigler E., Kagan, S., & Klugman E., 1983)

Nursery schools have existed in a formal way longer than any other early childhood program studied. This longevity, along with the title teacher, facilitates an understanding of those

services nursery schools provide and the role they play in the development of young children. In fact, this may build a credibility for nursery school teaching as a recognized occupation. Perhaps the fact that workers in this study did not distinguish among the other child care occupations indicates that a similar credibility has not yet been developed for other child care jobs.

There are other social indicators which point to an explanation of the higher rankings of nursery school teachers on status and pay. Nursery school teachers work shorter hours, command higher salary, and deal more exclusively with middle and upper-middle class populations. Even the terms used by society to describe work performed differ (Pettygrove, Whitebook, & Weir, 1984). Nursery school teachers "teach" while day care workers "babysit".

Yet, despite these social indicators, child care workers do not agree on rankings of job value. They do not agree that any single child care job provides the greatest contribution to society. Job value can be construed as the most personal of the three occupational worth variables studied. It would seem to be less affected by outside influences. That is, a worker may feel a job is inherently important, regardless of the pay or status it commands. As a result, this sense of intrinsic worth may be translated into a ranking of job value which is unrelated, or at least unrestricted, by rankings of pay and status.

The second contradiction concerns the assignment of high status and pay to nursery school teachers versus with the

inability to make any other clear distinctions on deserved pay and status between the remaining four occupational groups. Although the five early childhood groups studied have been identified as categories of child care work, each group brings with it a separate origin and history. Perhaps nursery school programs have developed a social acceptability. On the other hand, Head Start and day care programs historically have been perceived as serving poor and disadvantaged children from broken and troubled homes. Unlike nursery school programs which historically have been viewed as a mechanism by which to prepare young children for formal schooling, Head Start and day care programs are somewhat different. These programs focus on meeting family, as well as child, needs. In addition to the primary cognitive or learning goals of nursery school programs, Head Start and day care programs are also concerned with the physical, social and emotional needs of child and family members. It would appear that neither society nor child care workers themselves are able to sort out these differences and assign relative occupational values to Head Start and day care programs.

Indices of Professionalism

The concept of professionalism creates a discrepancy which arises when respondents identify themselves as professionals when directly asked, but fail to identify their current jobs as actual employment on more subtle measures such as career profile patterns. Specifically, over 40% of the respondents identified career profiles that would not be usually considered professional. That is, slightly over one-fourth of all

respondents cited a career profile of "school to work to marriage to homemaking career" and 14.9% cited a career profile of "school to brief work experience to marriage" as the profile which best describes their work histories. Yet all of the respondents providing these answers were engaged in some type of paid child care work. This suggests that for some child care workers, their present job in the child care field is not considered actual employment. This is further substantiated by the finding that less than half of the respondents identified themselves as business persons, yet all received some kind of remuneration for the work they performed.

In addition to these indices of professionalism, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported working six years or less and being unsure how long they will remain in their child care job. For some child care workers, employment appears to be goal and time specific. Some respondents estimated short participation, a few estimated a life-long commitment. The worker who decides to care for children only while her own children are young, the worker who uses nursery school teaching as a first employment, or the worker who selects a position in a day care setting as an occupational last resort may have similar short-term, but different long-tern professional needs and commitments than the veteran child care worker. A need for professional identity may be also different for these two groups.

The findings in this study indicate there is confusion among child care workers about their own and their peers' occupational worth. The results further demonstrate an unclear perception of

the viability of child care work as an occupation or the feasibility of it as a profession by the people most familiar with the work. In that sense, child care workers may be their own worst enemies. Instead of providing leadership with clear messages to society about their occupation and its worth, the view they provide is confused.

In the past, early childhood professionals and reserachers have examined the impact of society (e.g., low status, low salary) on the development of child care work as a profession (Katz, 1984a, 1984b; McCartney, 1984; Spodek, Saracho, & Peters, 1988). This study reveals that the occupational self-image and confusion of child care workers about their job worth and professional identity may actually contribute to society's negative views and meager rewards relative to child care work.

Traditional preparation and on-going professional development of child care workers has focused primarily on providing knowledge and developing skills to deliver quality child care. The results of this study suggest that traditional training should go beyond this focus and include content that builds a sense of involvement in a profession that makes important contributions to society and helps its workers advocate for that profession.

In addition to basic child care and child development, child care workers might also benefit from opportunities for professional development that foster the recognition that all child care work is important. Occupational worth could then be more closely tied to the value of caring for and teaching young

children rather than being linked to the prestige of credentials or titles of the caregiver or the nature or kind of child care setting. Smith (1987), in a presentation which addressed the future of the child care profession, supports this view and states, "We can have the most positive impact on services to children and their families by finding ways to negate the dichotomies that split our field apart" (p. 37).

To facilitate the development of a sense of professionalism for all workers, training could be used to provide collaboration, cooperation, and respect for differences. Child care workers might be provided with the means to learn what they have in common with each other and to view their differences as potential resources. This focus on professionalism can be used by organizations (e.g., NAEYC, ACEI) for the development of policies and advocacy strategies that diminish destructive stereotypes and occupational hierarchies within the child care field.

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Occupational Group	N	df	F	p
Day Care Home	99	4,98	2.3700	.0500
Group Day Care Home	25	4,24	2.7300	.0339
Day Care Center	95	4,94	9.0800	.0001
Head Start	26	4,25	6.0400	.0002
Nursery School	87	4,86	0.1700	N.S.

Table 1. Summary of Perceptions of Deserved Job Pay by Child Care/Occuaptional Group

Occupational Group	N	df	F	p
Day Care Home	102	4,101	2.5700	.0377
Group Day Care Home	26	4,25	14.6900	.0001
Day Care Center	98	4,97	2.2000	.0500
Head Start	26	4,25	5.2400	.0007
Nursery School	85	4,84	4.3000	.0021.

Table 2. Summary of Perceptions of Deserved Job Status by Child Care/Occupational Group